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- 1. A computer-implemented method for processing a search query received from a user, comprising:
 - (a) identifying, within each of a plurality of categories, a set of items that satisfy the search query;
 - (b) using at least the sets of items identified in (a) to determine category significance levels that indicate, for each of the plurality of categories, a level of significance of the category to the query; and
 - (c) presenting the plurality of categories to the user, together with associated items that satisfy the search query, in a display order which depends upon the category significance levels determined in (b).
- 2. The method as in Claim 1, wherein (c) further comprises determining the display order based on a profile of the user.
 - 3. The method as in Claim 1, wherein (b) comprises:

determining, for at least one category of the plurality of the categories, item popularity scores for the corresponding set of items that satisfy the query; and

using the item popularity scores to determine the category significance level for the category.

- 4. The method as in Claim 3, wherein the item popularity scores are based on at least one type of user activity that evidences user affinities for particular items.
- 5. The method as in Claim 4, wherein the at least one type of user activity comprises at least one of the following: (i) selecting an item from a list of search results, (ii) placing an item in a shopping cart, and (iii) purchasing an item.

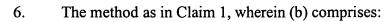
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determining, for at least one category of the plurality of the categories, a number of items that satisfy the query; and

generating for the category a score which is based on at least said number of items that satisfy the query relative to a total number of items within the category.

- 7. The method as in Claim 1, wherein (c) comprises displaying, for at least one of the plurality of categories, only a selected subset of the items that satisfy the query.
 - 8. The method as in Claim 1, wherein the items include products.

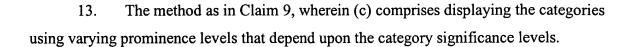
9. A computer-implemented method of processing a search query received from a user, comprising:

- (a) identifying, within each of a plurality of categories, items that satisfy the search query;
- (b) determining, for each of the plurality of categories, a level of significance of the category to the query; and
- (c) displaying the plurality of categories and associated items to the user according to at least the category significance levels determined in (b).
- 10. The method as in Claim 9, wherein (c) comprises displaying the categories in a display order which depends upon the category significance levels.
- 11. The method as in Claim 10, wherein (c) comprises displaying categories from highest to lowest category significance level.
- 12. The method as in Claim 10, wherein (c) further comprises determining the display order based on a profile of the user.

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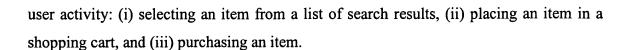
- 14. The method as in Claim 9, wherein (b) comprises:

 determining, for at least one category of the plurality of the categories,
 item popularity scores for items that satisfy the query; and
- using the item popularity scores to determine the category significance level for the category.
- 15. The method as in Claim 14, wherein the item popularity scores are based on at least one type of user activity that evidences user affinities for particular items.
 - 16. The method as in Claim 9, further comprising determining whether the query is satisfied by any web pages that, based on a set of rules, have been determined to within a selected level of confidence to include product offerings.

A search engine system, comprising:

a repository of items that are arranged within categories; and
a query server that at least (a) identifies, within each of multiple categories
of the repository, items that satisfy a search query received from a user, (b) for
each of the multiple categories, determines a level of significance of the category
to the query, and (c) displays the multiple categories to the user in a display order
which depends upon the category significance levels.

- 18. The search engine system as in Claim 17, wherein the query server determines the significance levels based on at least popularity levels of items that satisfy the query.
- 19. The search engine system as in Claim 17, further comprising a component that determines the item popularity levels based on at least one of the following types of



- 20. The search engine system as in Claim 17, wherein the query server further selects the display order based on a profile of the user.
 - 21. The search engine system as in Claim 17, wherein the repository comprises a least one database of products sold by a merchant.